

NEWS RELEASE

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

Commissioner Claire DeMatteis

Presented by Jason P. Miller, Chief of Communications and Community Relations

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Inmate tests positive for COVID-19; DOC announces three additional positive test results for Correctional Officers

Dover, DE -- The Delaware Department of Correction (DOC) announced today that a third COVID-19 test administered on 73 year-old [Joseph Russo, who died on Thursday at Bayhealth Hospital, Kent Campus](#), was returned positive for COVID-19. Russo's cause of death from acute respiratory failure has been determined to be due to complications from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and COVID. Russo was part of a minimum security housing unit of 45 inmates that has been closely monitored by security and medical staff since April 8, with twice daily temperature checks and proactive COVID-19 testing on April 10. Russo's proactive COVID-19 test was returned as negative, as was a second COVID-19 test administered by Bayhealth on April 14 when he was admitted to Bayhealth Hospital, Kent Campus.

"The Department of Correction is deeply saddened that for the first time COVID has been determined to be a contributing factor in the death of an inmate," **Commissioner Claire DeMatteis said.** "This reinforces the critical importance of all of the aggressive, proactive screening, monitoring, cleaning and treatment efforts that are being carried out around the clock at each of our facilities. Those efforts have so far helped us limit COVID infection to 13 inmates in one housing unit in one prison facility and 2 inmates in one housing area of one Community Corrections Center, and we are working hard to keep it that way."

The DOC also announced that three Correctional Officers have tested positive for COVID-19, bringing the total number to 17 Correctional Officers to test positive for the virus. Review an informational chart of positive COVID-19 cases among DOC employees, contracted staff and inmates for each DOC facility by [clicking HERE](#).

- **A Correctional Officer who is assigned to James T. Vaughn Correctional Center.** This Officer was last at the facility 9 days ago – on Wednesday, April 8. After beginning to experience flu-like symptoms, the Officer began to self-isolate at home, and as symptoms developed the Officer sought medical attention, at which time a COVID-19 test was administered. The positive COVID-19 test result was received by the Officer on Thursday, April 16 and subsequently verified by the DOC.
- **A Correctional Officer who is assigned to James T. Vaughn Correctional Center.** This Officer was last at the facility 3 days ago - on Tuesday, April 14. After beginning to experience flu-like symptoms, the Officer began to self-isolate at home, and as

symptoms developed the Officer sought medical attention, at which time a COVID-19 test was administered. The positive COVID-19 test result was received by the Officer on Thursday, April 16 and subsequently verified by the DOC.

- **A Correctional Officer who is assigned to James T. Vaughn Correctional Center.** This Officer was last at the facility 5 days ago – on Sunday, April 12. After beginning to experience flu-like symptoms, the Officer began to self-isolate at home, and as symptoms developed the Officer sought medical attention, at which time a COVID-19 test was administered. The positive COVID-19 test result was received by the Officer on Thursday, April 16 and subsequently verified by the DOC.

No additional information will be provided about the identity of the Officers for privacy protection.

The DOC is employing a variety of prevention, screening, cleaning and containment measures to guard against the spread of the novel coronavirus, including:

- All persons, including Officers, administrative staff and probationers who enter any Level V prison, Level IV violation of probation or work release center, or Probation and Parole Office are screened for COVID-19, including a series of questions and a forehead temperature check with a thermometer
- Staff who present with symptoms are sent home to self-quarantine and directed to contact their health care provider.
- Newly arriving inmates are held in isolation for the first 14 days, during which they are carefully monitored, including daily temperature checks with a thermometer.
- DOC has implemented extra daily cleaning of DOC facilities and is using specialized fogging machines to disinfect entire rooms of common areas, housing units and workspaces.
- Face masks are being worn by Correctional Officers and contract healthcare workers as a protection for inmates, Officers and other employees. **All Correctional Officers have been wearing face masks since April 10. Face masks have also been provided to more than 500 inmates who are in infirmaries, those with compromised immune systems, and certain inmates with institutional jobs, such as food service.**
- Most Probationer visits with Probation Officers were transitioned to phone check-ins in March to support social distancing measures.

In addition, the DOC has temporarily suspended in-person prison programming to reduce the movement of people into facilities and movement of groups of people within facilities. Certain programs, including treatment and education programs and religious programming, are being transitioned to a virtual video format. Inmates continue to have outside recreation opportunities within their confined areas and continue to have access to phones to stay in regular contact with their loved ones. DOC is also expanding the use of electronic tablets among the inmate population, where available.

Get updated information about the DOC's response to COVID-19 and read previous announcements of positive COVID-19 cases by visiting <https://doc.delaware.gov>, and follow *decorrection* on Facebook and Twitter.

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